

What is bullying?

Definitions activity for Anti-Bullying Awareness Week **(21st – 25th November 2005)**

Background

Being clear about the definition is essential if children and young people are to know when they have been bullied. There are many misunderstandings about bullying and children and young people often do not realise that it does not relate just to a type of behaviour but there needs to be a persistence about it.

The DfEE definition (taken from Don't suffer in silence pack 2000) suggests that bullying is:

- Deliberately hurtful (including aggression)
- Repeated often over a period of time
- Difficult for the victim to defend themselves against

Rigby talks about bullying as 'the systematic abuse of power' and the power imbalance is key to an understanding of bullying. Therefore, as Dan Olweus, Norwegian researcher says 'it would not be bullying if two friends of equal strength had the odd fight or quarrel'.

The aim of the following activity is to clarify what bullying is and what it is not.

Activity One

The key message of this activity is that bullying is not always easy to determine and in many of the scenarios more information is needed before decisions can be made as to whether they are bullying or not.

Ask the children/young people to consider a scenario such as the ones given in the Anti-Bullying Alliance pack:

- Amanda says to Claire 'you'd better give that £2 or else'?
- Enrico is on the ground and Mark is bashing him?
- Sam is pouring Katie's can of coke into the grass?
- A group pelts Josh with snowballs while he runs away laughing?
- Some boys follow Paul and laugh at him on his way home from school?
- Every time Serla goes past Joanne she gives her hair a tweak?
- The girls in Year 8 wolf whistle at Fred every time he passes them?

Depending on the age of the children you can give one or more of the scenarios and in groups of 4, children/young people would be asked to discuss whether the scenario is bullying or not giving their reasons.

With younger children this may be as much as you can achieve in a lesson. With older children you could carry on into the next activity.

Activity 2

Using the responses from the groups, the class then discusses the characteristics of bullying and say why some aspects of behaviour are bullying and others not.

Now give them the following definition of bullying which has been written in child speak by Dan Olweus:

' A pupil is being bullied, or picked on, when another pupil or group of pupils say nasty things to him or her. It is also bullying when a pupil is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, texts or e-mails, when no-one ever talks to them or things like that. These things can happen frequently and it is difficult for the pupil being bullied to defend himself. It is also bullying when a pupil is teased repeatedly in a nasty way. But it is not bullying when two children or young people of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel.'

There needs to be discussion about how bullying differs from a one-off incident.

Given this information does it change the way they view some of the scenarios they have felt were definitely bullying. Discuss this further.

Next ask the children in their groups to come up with a sentence or several sentences of what they feel bullying is and what it is not. This may need to be given orally and recorded by an adult.

Each group presents their definition to the class and the class checks they have all the relevant characteristics. Only those that have all the right characteristics are considered for the class/group definition. Children are asked to decide with a show of hands or sticky dots, their favourite definition and that then becomes the class/group definition.

All children can then design posters including this definition.